E L D E R

PAISIOS

1924 - 1994

THE NEW GENERATION

Η ΝΕΑ ΓΕΝΙΑ

IMPUDENCE AND LACK OF RESPECT

Η ΑΝΑΙΔΕΙΑ ΚΑΙ Η ΕΛΛΕΙΨΗ ΣΕΒΑΣΜΟΥ

ΑΓΓΛΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ

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ELDER PAISIOS
(1924 – 1994)

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Impudence and Lack of Respect

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ΒΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΟ ΣΗΜΕΙΩΜΑ

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The Blessed Elder Paisios, whose name in the world was Arsenios Eznepides, was born in *Pharasa* of Cappadocia on 25 July 1924. Shortly before his family left for Greece with the exchange of populations in 1924, the Elder was baptized by Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, who gave him his own name and foretold that "he was leaving a monk in his place." Upon arriving in Greece, his family settled in Konitsa of Epeirus where the Elder spent his childhood and young adult years.

From the time that he was a child, he lived an ascetic life, and was nourished by the lives of the Saints, whose feats he sought to imitate with great zeal and admirable precision. He practised unceasing prayer, cultivating all along the virtues of humility and love. He learned the trade of carpentry, wanting even in this aspect of his life, to imitate Christ. He fulfilled his military duty during the Guerilla War in Greece (1945-1949), serving for three and a half years in the Army as a wireless radio operator, and living ascetically even during this troubled time. During this time, he was distinguished for his valour, his ethos of self-sacrifice, moral integrity and many other virtues. Having fulfilled his duty to his country, he entered the

monastic life, which he had desired from his youth. Even as a layman, he had divine experiences, but the favour of the Lord, the *Theotokos* and the Saints intensified during his monastic life. He led an ascetic life on Mount Athos, in the Holy Monastery of Stomion in Konitsa, and on Mount Sinai in Egypt. He lived in obscurity, giving himself completely to God, and God in turn revealed him and gave him to the whole world. He guided, consoled, healed and granted peace to the multitudes of people who sought him. His sanctified soul overflowed with divine love and his saintly face radiated the divine Grace. All day long, he tirelessly gathered the human pain and imparted divine consolation.

He is the founder of the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti of Thessaloniki, Greece, which he also guided spiritually for twenty-eight years (1967-1994). It was to this Holy Monastery that he also entrusted and treasured the Holy Relics of his Godfather, Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, to whose memory a temple of Byzantine design was later erected.

After suffering excruciating pains, which, as he used to say, benefited him more than the ascetic struggles of his entire life, he fell asleep in the Lord on 12 July 1994, in the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti, Thessaloniki. He was buried next to the Church of Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian.

May we have his blessing, Amen.

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ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟΣ

PREFACE

When the Blessed Elder Paisios fell asleep in the Lord on 12 July 1994, he left behind a spiritual legacy: his teachings. Ever a simple monk, with only an elementary school education, but rich in the wisdom of God, the Elder emptied himself for the sake of others. His teaching was neither instruction, nor catechism. He lived the Gospel, and everything he taught flowed naturally from his way of life, whose main characteristic was love. He had formed himself according to the Gospel and, for this reason, it was his countenance that taught first and then his evangelical love and enlightened word. When he received people of all backgrounds, he did not simply listen patiently to the problems they confided in him, but with his holy simplicity and discernment, he would enter deeply into their heart and make their pain, anxiety and trouble his own. And, then, gradually, the miracle would take place: the transformation of the person. He used to say, "God performs a miracle when we wholeheartedly participate in the pain of our fellow human beings."

We saw with great joy the interest generated by the first books that circulated on the life and teachings of the Elder Paisios. Many spoke with admiration about the

answers they found to their questions, the solutions to their problems and the consolation to their grief. Our joy was even greater when people who had distanced themselves from the Mother Church became rightly concerned and changed their way of life. We often thought of the words of the hymnographer referring to Saint Basil the Great: *He lives, though he lies asleep in the Lord; he lives even among us, as one who speaks through his writings*. At the same time, we felt a compelling need to offer the very beneficial words of Elder Paisios – which we were recording with reverence from the very first steps of our Sisterhood, because they were so helpful to us – to our brothers and sisters in Christ who were so persistently asking for them.

The Good God provided that our *Hesychasterion*[1] owe its very existence to Elder Paisios. It was he who received the Episcopal approval of His Eminence, Synesios, the Metropolitan of Kassandreia, to establish our Monastery and who sought to find the appropriate location. And he did this because his noble and sensitive heart felt great gratitude to us for having taken care of him when we first met him, in 1966, during a hospital stay for a lung operation. From that time on, he felt that he was our big brother and had the obligation to "provide for his sisters," as he used to say, by establishing the Monastery. The first Sisters were settled at the Monastery in October of 1967. Elder Paisios spent two months in the *Hesychasterion* to help in the organization of the coenobitic life. After that, he would come out of Mount Athos, usually twice a year, to help the Sisterhood in their monastic way of life and he would assist each Sister individually in her spiritual struggle, with his God inspired advice and his personal experience. From the Holy Mountain, the "spiritual America", as he used to call it, he continued to help them through prayer and the letters he would send to each Sister individually or to the entire Sisterhood.

1. *Hesychasterion* (pl. *Hesychasteria)* in Greece and outside Mount Athos is a Coenobitic Monastery in which the local Bishop has the right to intervene in spiritual matters alone, but not in administrative matters.

In 1967, when Elder Paisios started establishing the foundations of coenobitic life in the *Hesychasterion*, from the simplest practical things to the most spiritual, he was forty-three years old. He had already attained the mature manhood *to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph 4:13) and he had the wisdom of an Elder. From the first days of coenobitic life, we discovered that his words were *the words of eternal life* (Jn 6:68) and that much of what he said should be taken as an axiom for our daily life. For this reason, we felt compelled to write down his words so that they would not to be forgotten and could serve as a secure rule for monastic life.

After we filled the first notebooks, we submitted them with considerable hesitation to his judgment. We hesitated because the Elder always emphasized the practical application; he did not want us just to gather material, "ammunitions", without putting his words into action. He always asked that we cultivate spiritually whatever we heard or read. Otherwise, he used to explain to us, there would be no benefit from all writings and notes just as there is no benefit to a state when it has a lot of armaments but lacks a trained army that will put them in use. Relenting to our persistent pleas, he agreed to see our notes and

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to complete or correct any points that we had not understood correctly.

The recording of his spiritual counsels continued all along the twenty-eight years that the Elder was overseeing and guiding the *Hesychasterion*. All meetings of the Elder with the entire Sisterhood or the Monastery Council and the Abbess were recorded – initially by notes taken down by the Sisters and later by tape recorder. Also recorded were conversations between the Elder and each Sister separately, who wrote down his words immediately after her conversation with him was over. When Elder Paisios realized what we were doing, he was rather irritated: "Why are you taking this down?" he asked. "Are you saving it for an emergency? You should put it into practice; apply it. Who knows what you are saying in these notes! Let me see." When we showed him a sample, the notes of one Sister, his expression changed; he was comforted and reassured, and with satisfaction exclaimed, "My goodness! She is like a tape recorder! She wrote it exactly as I said it!"

Our conversations with Elder Paisios were usually in the form of answers to our questions. In his private conversations with the Sisters, the questions mainly concerned their personal struggle. In meetings with the Monastery Council, which were scheduled in advance, subjects were raised that concerned us during his absence. These were put in the form of questions to be discussed when he came to visit. These questions covered all kinds of subjects: administrative, practical, spiritual, social, ecclesiastical, national and so forth. Finally, in meetings of the entire Sisterhood, besides the questions raised by the Sisters, the Elder discussed various other topics

which simply came up on the spot, in the course of the conversation. The Elder would use every word and image he could for the spiritual benefit of the soul. The sound of an aeroplane flying over the Monastery, the noise of a machine, the chirping of a bird, the opening of a door or a simple phrase could set him talking for a long time about a serious matter. "I put everything to use," he used to say, "in order to reach Heaven. If we approach and work on all things spiritually, do you know how much spiritual profit can be made and what spiritual experience can be acquired?"

In his contacts with people, Father Paisios sought to prepare them for the Kingdom of Heaven by helping them to know the will of God and come closer to Him. Thus, he put to practice one of his favourite sayings that "the Good God looks after us first for our next life and then for this life." When he mentioned something about nature, science, art or everyday life, he was not interested in these subjects themselves, but used them as parables in order to awaken souls, and to help them grasp the deeper meaning of life and "cling" to God.

Because his manner of speech was simple, spontaneous and full of natural humour, he could tell the greatest truths in a plain and joyful manner. "I am making sunshine," he used to say; he meant that just like the sun is necessary for the flowers to bloom, a gentle pastoral approach enables the opening and healing of the soul. This was his enlightened pastoral care, which often prepared the soil of the soul to receive the austerity of his words about the unyielding and steadfast evangelical truth. In this way, even his most demanding word fell

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upon the human heart as a beneficial dew, cultivating it and bringing forth spiritual fruit.

After Elder Paisios fell asleep, the material that was collected during these twenty-eight years, together with the letters that he had sent to the *Hesychasterion* from the Holy Mountain, was classified according to subject so as to be used everyday in the life of the *Coenobium*. Events relating to his life were also recorded, including those of a divine nature, to which he referred not for bragging but for spiritual charity. "I am not telling you this," he used to say, "so that you can give me ribbons, and bravos. When I tell a war story from the time of my military service, or anything else, even a humorous example, I do so to make a point, so that you can grasp its deeper meaning. I don't like talking about useless things." In this manner he made himself a "spiritual blood donor". He wanted to fortify our anaemic faith, trigger our *philotimo*[2] and, being the noble man of God that he was, to cultivate the same nobility in us so that we can become by grace akin to God. "More and more I am emptying myself," he used to say, "and what is the result? In order to help you, I am forced to speak about myself; this is such a waste, a spiritual waste! Does it at least help you? I want you to know that every time I have to mention an incident from my life, how, for instance, the Providence of God has helped me on a certain occasion, something is being lost; I feel emptier. Does it at least bear fruit for you?"

2. *Philotimo*, according to Elder Paisios, is the reverent distillation of goodness, the love shown by humble people, from which every trace of self has been filtered out. Their hearts are full of gratitude towards God and their fellow men, and out of spiritual sensitivity and a sense of honour they try to repay the slightest good which others do for them.

Taking into account the difficult years that we are living through, we decided to publish all this material in a series of volumes starting with those topics that would be of general interest. Although many of these topics are part of everyday life, they must still be faced according to the Gospel; otherwise, the consequences for this life but also for our future, eternal life will be sorrowful or worse yet, devastating.

In making this decision, we were encouraged by an idea that Elder Paisios had entertained for years. He wanted to write "a book that would reach everybody, laity, monks and clergy." The idea had never materialized, since he gave all of his time to the many hurting souls who came every day to his *Kalyvi*. He gave himself completely to them, despite his limited and diminishing physical strength. "My news," he wrote in one of his letters "is many tired and suffering people. The people and their problems are ever increasing. Please pray that my physical strength not decrease. I need to provide a bit for myself, because I must be always ready to help, whether I can or not."

As already mentioned, the Elder usually responded to a variety of questions. For this reason, when faced with the task of integrating the various topics that he had addressed on different occasions, we decided to keep the dialogue form. Included in these dialogues, are excerpts from letters he had sent to the Monastery, extracts of books that he had written, as well as any additional material from his correspondence with other brothers and sisters in Christ, who entrusted us with their letters and with notes they had kept in their conversations with the Elder.

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The aim was to give each topic the fullest possible coverage. Every effort was also made to preserve, as much as possible, the immediacy and the grace of his spoken words. Some repetitive remarks that stressed the deeper meaning of his word and pierced many hearts were retained, as well as many exclamations, which were a natural part of his story telling, coming from a heart that was pulsating with great love for God and humankind.

References to monastic life are frequent, not only because Father Paisios was addressing nuns, but also because he wanted lay people to seek "the joy of Monasticism" that springs from total surrender to God. He believed that in this way they might be saved from the insecurity caused by a total dependence on the self. He wanted them to enjoy Heaven in this life.

With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man is the first volume of the series *Spiritual Counsels* of the Elder Paisios of Mount Athos. In order to make its content more useful to the reader, it was divided into four thematic parts. Each part is subdivided into chapters and every chapter into sections with the appropriate subheadings. Footnotes that explain terms from the spiritual and monastic life will be more than familiar to those brothers and sisters in Christ who are well acquainted with patristic texts. They have been added in order to assist readers who lack this background.

As Elder Paisios made frequent use of examples from science, art and other fields, as noted above, we ran the risk of not rendering correctly some of his verbal terminology or expressions. For this reason, before publication, we

invited the review of certain sections and chapters from brothers and sisters in Christ who specialise in the relevant areas. We wish to thank them for examining this material with great reverence for the Elder and for making the appropriate corrections. We would, of course, be grateful for any additional suggestions.

We pray that "the spiritual waste" offered by the Elder out of an abundance of love, will bear fruit in the simple and good willing hearts of his readers, and that they will be enriched with the wisdom of God that is *hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes* (Lk 10:21).

Amen.

Sunday of All Saints, June 14, 1998

The Abbess of the Holy *Hesychasterion*
Mother Philothei
and the Sisters in Christ with me

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CHAPTER THREE

The New Generation

The Spirit of Sacrifice Is Missing

Most people today have not tasted the joy of sacrifice and are not fond of toil. An easy going, lazy life and much comfort have taken centre stage. Gone are *philotimo* and sacrifice. People consider it a great achievement when they succeed in something without making an effort, when they are easily accommodated. But when they have to make an effort, they are unhappy. If they were approaching life spiritually, things would be different: the mere opportunity to struggle would give them joy.

Nowadays, both young and old, care only for convenience and comfort. Spiritual people aspire to holiness, but they want to get there the easy way. Those who live in the world want to make more money but work less. Young people want to pass their exams without studying and get their diplomas without ever leaving the coffee shops. And if possible, they would even love to call from there and get their exam scores over the phone! This is how far they will go. Many young students come to my *Kalyvi* and tell me, "Pray for me to pass my exams." They do not study

and then say, "God will help me." "You must study and pray too," I advise them. "Why," they answer, "can't God help me?" They expect God to bless their laziness. That's not possible. Now, if someone studies hard but he doesn't get anything out of it, God will help him. There are some young people who have memory and comprehension problems but try hard nevertheless. God will help them become brilliant.

Fortunately, there are exceptions. A young man from Chalkidiki applied to three University Schools and was accepted in all of them with a first or second rank.[1] But he felt more comfortable finding a job to relieve his father who was working in the mines. So he deferred his studies and took a job. Such souls are medicine for me. I am willing to die for them, to have them step all over me. Most young people, however, have been affected by the secular spirit and are in bad shape. All they know is how to take care of their needs. They could not care less about others, they only think of themselves. The more you help them, the lazier they become.

You cannot imagine how bland some young people are today. All they do is judge everything and get bored with everything when, in essence, the heart is never bored and does not get old. The monastic life, they find it boring; marriage scares them. You see these robust young men come to the Holy Mountain again and again and say, "Oh, the monk's life is so tough; you must get up at midnight every day, not just one or two days, a week..." So they return to the world. "What will I do in this kind

1. In the past, in Greece, it was customary for students to take entrance examinations for more than one University School.

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of society," they wonder, "what kind of person will I have to live with if I get married? Oh, it's such a bother," they conclude, and they return to the Holy Mountain. They stay for a while ... and then they start all over again, "It's so tough..."

Young people of today resemble new engines whose oil is frozen. The oil has to be warmed in order for the engines to restart; there is no other way. Many young men, troubled souls, come to my *Kalyvi* – it's not just one or two – and they ask me, "What should I do, Father? How should I spend my time? I am bored." "Find a job, my son!" "I have money; I do not need to work," he tells me. "But," I reply, "the Apostle Paul says, *If any one will not work, let him not eat.*[2] You must work in order to eat even if you have money. Work helps a man thaw out the oil of his engine. To work is to create. It gives you joy and takes away your stress and boredom. So, my son, this is what you should do; find a job that you like enough to get started. Just give it a try, and you will see the difference!"

But then, there are also young men who will get tired, but they find rest in fatigue, because they find fulfilment. Some will come to my *Kalyvi*, sit around and get tired doing nothing. Others who have a lot of *philotimo* will ask me constantly, "Is there anything we can do for you? Is there anything we can get you?" I never ask for anything. At night I use the flashlight to do my errands, whether it is fetching wood to light the stove or straightening the place up. Many of the visitors create a mess, leaving mud and wet socks everywhere. I give them the fine socks that I receive as gifts and they throw away their soiled ones.

2. II Th 3:10.

I give them paper napkins to wrap them and dispose of them, but they leave them lying around.

Three times in my life I have asked for something. Once I told a young man, "I need two boxes of matches from Karyes" – even though I had four lighters. I did this only to make him happy. He rushed there and returned out of breath to bring the matches, but this fatigue refreshed him because he tasted the joy of sacrifice. And all along, another fellow was getting tired just from sitting around. These young men are looking for joy, but joy will not come if we don't sacrifice ourselves. Sacrifice gives birth to joy. Real joy comes from *philotimo*. Once we cultivate *philotimo*, then we'll have a real festival inside us! Egoism and self-love is what causes us pain. That's where we get stuck.

Two young officers had come to the Holy Mountain and told me that they wanted to become monks. "Why do you want to become monks? How long have you been thinking about it?" I asked. "Just now," they said, "we visited the Holy Mountain and thought of staying here, in case a war breaks out." "Aren't you ashamed of yourselves?" I asked. "Listen to them, 'if a war breaks out'! And how will you manage to leave the army?" "We will find an excuse." What excuse were they going to find? They would probably pretend they are crazy ... or they would come up with something else. "If you set out to become a monk with this mindset, you have failed already," I told them. There are also those who, even though they have been planning for long time to get married and start a family, will come and tell me, "Why should I marry? These are difficult times to raise a family." "Fine," I reply, "did life stop during the time of persecutions? Weren't

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people working or getting married then? Or, are you perhaps too lazy to get married?" "I want to become a monk," he insists. "But you are bored. What kind of a hard-working monk are you going to be?" Do you see my point? If a woman wants to become a nun because she is thinking, "What's the point of staying in the world, of getting married, and having kids, headaches and troubles? I will go to a Monastery where I will do what they tell me and have no responsibilities, and if they should reprimand me, I will just bow my head. Why bother having my own household? At the Monastery lodging and food will be provided..." This kind of person will definitely fail right from the start. Do you find this strange? There are a lot of people who think like this. You must know that a hard-working man will prosper no matter what he does. A hard-working family man would also be a good monk, and a hard-working monk would also be a good family man.

There was once someone who had joined a Monastery as a novice and did not want to become a monk. "Why, my son, are you still a novice?" I asked him. "Because the monk's cap reminds me of a helmet," was his answer. Can you believe this? This person did not want to become a monk because he did not want to wear the monk's cap. It reminded him of a helmet! When did he ever wear a helmet? Maybe he did a few times, while he was training in the army. Imagine if he had been to war! Listen to that! It reminded him of a helmet! What a thing to say! Why would such a person ever want to be a monk? When someone starts this way, what kind of monk will he be? Can you tell me? The poor fellow, he finally became a monk in some Monastery, but never put on a thick monastic cap.

Another time two young men came to my *Kalyvi* and their hair was really long. I tried to give them a haircut, but they resisted and, since I was in a hurry, I only offered them a treat. At that time, I had a kitten. One of them tells me, "May I take it?" "Take it," I said. They left in the rain, one of them holding the cat in his lap, and they headed for Iveron Monastery, an hour's walk away. He asked if he could spend the night at the *archontariki* with the cat. "That is not possible," he was told, and he ended up staying outside in the rain all night. If you had asked him to stay guard for an hour, he would have said, "No, I can't." But he was perfectly able to stay out a whole night, holding a kitten in his arms.

Another young man had gone to serve in the army but one day he took off; later he came to my *Kalyvi*. "I want to become a monk," he said. "You should go finish your military service first," was my answer. "But the army is not like my home," he replied. "Thank you for letting me know," I said, "this way I can warn others about it!" Meanwhile his family had been looking for him. A few days later he reappeared, early one morning. It was the Sunday after *Pascha*, the Sunday of Saint Thomas. "I need you," he tells me. "What do you want?" I asked him, "Where did you go to Church?" "Nowhere," he said. "Today, on Sunday of Saint Thomas, the Monasteries keep Vigils and you did not go to Church? And you want to become a monk! Where were you?" "I stayed at the hotel, where it's quiet. I find the Monasteries too noisy," he replied. "And what are you going to do now?" I asked him. "I am thinking of going to the Monastery at Sinai because I want to live a hard life," he replied. I said, "Wait a minute." I went inside and got him some fresh Easter

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bread, gave it to him and said, "Here, take this soft Easter bread to help you start your hard life and get out of here!" This is today's youth. They do not know what they want. They will not take any pressure. How can they possibly sacrifice themselves?

I remember, in the army, there were all kinds of urgent needs, and every time this happened, men would say, "Commander, let me go to this mission; this man is married, has children and it will be a pity for these children to be left without a father." There they were, asking the Commander to send them to the front lines! They found joy in the idea of getting killed so that others with children would not have to die and leave their children alone! I can't imagine anyone making this kind of sacrifice today! It would be a rare thing!

Once, we had run out of water. The Commander located on the map an area where we could find water, but the guerillas were there. He told us, "There is water somewhere near, but it is very dangerous. Who will go to fill some canteens with water; it will have to be done in the dark." One man came forward immediately, "I will go, Commander," and then another, and another. Everybody wanted to go. It was going to be a night mission, in the dark and a dangerous one. "You cannot all go," the Commander said. What I am trying to say is that no one thought of himself in that situation. You did not hear, "Commander, my foot is hurting," or "I have a headache," or "I am tired." Everybody wanted to go, even though our life was at risk.

These days there's a lukewarm spirit; there's no manliness, no sacrifice. People's afflicted logic has turned everything upside down. You see, in the past, people

would go voluntarily to serve in the army, whereas today, they will try to get a doctor to diagnose them as crazy to get an exemption. They will try everything to avoid the draft. This was unheard of in the old days. In our unit, we had a 23-year-old lieutenant, young but very brave! One day his father, a retired army officer, called him to say that he was planning to use his influence to have him relocated from the front lines to the rear. The lieutenant became really upset, "Shame on you, father, for saying such things! Only drones do nothing." His honesty, candour and bravery exceeded all bounds; he was always first in the front line. His greatcoat was full of bullet holes, but he was still alive. When he was discharged, he took the greatcoat with him as a souvenir.

Indiscriminate Love Spoils Children

I have observed that today many children, especially those who are students, are harmed by their families. While they are basically good children, they are rendered useless. They don't put their mind to work; they have become insensitive. It is the parents who spoil them. Because the parents have gone through difficult years, they do not want their children to be deprived of anything. They don't cultivate *philotimo* in their children so that they can find joy in deprivation. It's not that parents don't mean well. It would be cruel to deprive a child that does not understand the reason for the deprivation. But it is right for the parents to try and help their children acquire a sort of monastic conscience, to rejoice when they do not have something they want. Now, with their goodness, their indiscriminate goodness and generosity, parents are

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spoiling their children. They use no discernment and end up stupefying them. These children expect to be served at all times; even a glass of water they will not get for themselves, supposedly because they are studying and cannot afford to waste any time. And they end up spoiled, both boys and girls. Even when they are not doing their homework, they still expect to be served. And of course, it's the mothers who are responsible. "You, go ahead and study, son," they say, "I will go and get you your socks, and wash your feet. Here's your coffee, here's your dessert"! And the children never realize how tired the mother gets from offering so much, because they never have to work for anything. Then they begin using disposable dishes, disposable clothes, eating pizzas and not even knowing how to wrap one up! Thus, they become useless human beings, who find life itself boring and tiresome. When their shoe lace comes untied all they know to say is, "Mother, please tie my shoe lace," and they go on stepping on it, doing nothing! How can these children ever achieve anything in life? They are incapable of getting married or becoming monks. This is why I tell mothers, "Do not let your children study all day, they will become dizzy. Have them take breaks of a quarter or half an hour to do some work around the house, to clear and rest their mind a little."

These bad habits among young people today are carried over to Monasticism. For instance, in one Monastery, there may be seven secretaries on duty – all of them educated – including the oldest. In the old days, there was only one secretary with barely two years of High School education, and he was able to handle the full load of work himself. And now, with seven secretaries and the senior

one helping, they are all drowning in work, and are unable to find time to carry out their spiritual duties!

Directives From Dark Powers

Today many young people are being misguided and destroyed by all kinds of ideas and theories. This is why so many of them are upset and confused. They want to go in one direction, but the current of our times takes them elsewhere. There are dark powers out there pushing their propaganda on young people who may not be very intelligent. In schools, for example, some teachers will say to their students, "If you want to develop initiative, do not listen to your parents; do not obey them." Words like these ruin young people. They no longer listen to their parents or teachers. And you can't blame them really, since that's what they think is expected of them. On the one hand there is the state, which often supports this kind of behaviour, while on the other hand we have people, who care nothing about country and family, issuing directives and taking advantage of the young people to achieve their evil ends. As a result, our youth has been so harmed that some of them end up under the direct leadership of the devil himself. Satan worship is wide spread. One can hear people in clubs singing all night, "Satan we adore you, we do not want Christ. You give us everything." What a horrific thing! But what is it that the devil will give you and what will he take from you, miserable children?

You see young men and women, adolescent youths, who have a wild look in their eyes from the many coffees they drink and the many cigarettes they smoke… Their eyes do not sparkle; the glow of God's Grace is nowhere

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to be seen on their face. An architect was right when he said to a group of young people whom he was escorting to the Holy Mountain, "Our eyes resemble the eyes of spoiled fish." He had accompanied a group of ten young men between the ages of eighteen to twenty five to the Holy Mountain. He himself had made a spiritual turn in his life and felt bad for young people who lived prodigal lives. So, he convinced some of them to come to the Holy Mountain. I met them on my way down from the *Kalyvi*. I said to them, "I am on my way out, but let's sit here for a while." And we did. At the same time some students were returning from the *Athonias* Academy and I invited them to join us. And we all sat together. The architect asked his company, "Have you noticed something here?" The young men were puzzled. "Look at each other's eyes and then look at the eyes of these students. Do you see that their eyes sparkle while ours resemble those of a spoiled fish?" And indeed, when I looked carefully at them, I realized that their eyes did resemble the eyes of spoiled fish: dull, spoiled, while the *Athonias* students' eyes would sparkle. The youths from the Academy made prostrations, attended regular worship services. The eyes are the reflection of the soul. This is why Christ said, *Your eye is the lamp of your body.*[3] So many youths come to the Holy Mountain or go to other Monasteries and become monks, and despite the fact that monastic life is, what should I say, no piece of cake, the joy they experience radiates from their face! But for so many who live in the world, life is sheer hell; they have everything they want but their life is full of pain.

3. Lk 11:34.

Various trends have come to us today from all directions. Hinduism and other occult religions have come from the East, communism from the north, various theories form the West; from the South, from Africa, we get magic and other forms of "cancer". A young man wounded by such beliefs came to my *Kalyvi* once. I understood that it was his mother's prayers that brought him to me. After we had conversed for a while I told him, "Look, son, you must find a Spiritual Father so that you may go to confession, receive the Holy Chrism and get some help in the beginning. You must be anointed again with the Holy Chrism because you have renounced Christ." The poor child was crying, "Father, please pray for me," he was pleading, "I cannot get rid of all these ideas, they have brainwashed me. I know that my mother's prayers have brought me to you."

Oh! How a mother's prayers can help us! These poor children are ruined, they get trapped and then they panic, they become anxious and turn to drugs, and go from one evil to another. May God help them!

—Geronda, does it help to tell these youths that these are satanic things?

—Of course it helps, but you must find the right way to say it.

—How can these youths get to know Christ?

—How can they possibly come to know Christ, when, before learning anything about Orthodoxy, they go to the gurus of India and stay there for two or three years? Then, after they get dizzy with all the magic tricks, they find out that there is mysticism in Orthodoxy and end up here seeking to see the light and have experiences of a higher nature. And if you ask them, "How long has it been

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since you took Holy Communion?" They say, "I do not remember if my mother had taken me to receive Holy Communion when I was little." You ask them, "Have you ever gone to confession?" "I don't care about confession," they reply. How can you get anywhere with these people, when they know nothing about Orthodoxy?

– How will they be helped, Geronda?

– Well, how can you help them if they see the Church as "the establishment"? You realize that it will be very difficult to find common ground with them. But young people of good disposition will be helped and will, in the end, return to the Church.

Don't Touch the Children!

– Geronda, what will become of so many children who grow up today without discipline?

– For them, there will be mitigating circumstances. It is the parents who never understood the nature of discipline that now allow their children such excessive freedom and turn them into little hooligans. You say one word to them and they will respond with five, and with such impudence! These children may one day turn into criminals. Today many children are totally unraveled by too much freedom and no discipline. "Don't touch the children!" These are the slogans in society. And of course what do children think? "Where else are we going to find a better regime than that?" In other words, they are deliberately turning them into little rebels who do not want to listen to parents, to teachers, or to anyone else. This serves their designs perfectly, for if children are not first taught to be rebellious, how can they end up later

destroying everything? And you can see the poor youth looking like they are virtually demonized.

If we, monks, cannot put freedom to good use in the spiritual life, what is one to expect of people who live in the world? If freedom is not put to good use, it is worth nothing. All it brings is disaster. This is why the country is heading in the wrong direction. Can today's people make good use of the freedom given to them? When freedom does not serve the cause of true progress, the result is catastrophe. Combined with secular progress, this sinful freedom has given rise to spiritual slavery. True spiritual freedom is spiritual obedience to the will of God. But you see, whereas it is obedience that will give us true freedom, the tempter, out of malice, presents it as enslavement, and so our youth today who have been poisoned by the spirit of rebellion, reject obedience. It is understandable that these young people are tired of the various ideologies of the twentieth century, which unfortunately distort God's beautiful creation and fill His creatures with anxiety, putting a gap between them and the true joy that is God.

Have you any idea what we went through when we were discharged from the army? If we were at all like today's youth, we would have gone on a rampage and destroyed everything on our path. It was in 1950, when the Guerilla War was over and many classes of recruits were discharged simultaneously from the Army. Some of us had been to war for four and a half years, others for four, others for three and a half. Well, after all these hardships, we arrive in Larisa and we head for the Transit Centres, only to find them full. So we tried some hotels but they would not accept us. "Soldiers!" they must have thought, "If they lodge here, not a single blanket will

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be left clean!" We, of course, had the money to pay the rate. It was March and very cold. Fortunately, an officer saved us, may God keep him well. He went and found out the train schedules and their manoeuvres and arranged to have us spend the night in the trains. "They will do manoeuvres throughout the night," he told us, "but don't be afraid, the trains will depart at this or that time in the morning." And indeed, the trains were manoeuvring all night long. Finally we got to Thessaloniki. Some of us were from around there and went to their homes. The rest of us went to Transit Centres but they too were full. Next, we tried the hotels but no luck. I pleaded with them at the hotel, "Please give me a chair to sit on and I will pay double the rate of a room!" "Sorry, we can't do that," they replied. They were afraid that someone might see me and turn them in for not giving a soldier a room. I spent the whole night outside with other soldiers standing up and leaning against a wall. There were soldiers lying down on all the pavements, as if we had a parade. If today's youth were in our place, they would have burned Larisa, Thessaly and the entire province of Macedonia to the ground. Although they face nothing compared to what we had to go through, they still do takeovers, destroy property… And back then, all those poor soldiers, were thinking so differently. They felt hurt and bitter but it never crossed their mind to do anything bad. They had been through so many hardships in the snow. Many had been wounded and crippled in the War – they sacrificed so much! – and now they had to sleep out on the street; that was the "thank you" they got! I can't help comparing today's youth with the young men I knew then… No more than fifty years have gone by, but look how the world has changed.

Today's youth resembles a calf that is tied in a meadow, and constantly kicks and pulls on the rope to remove the stake and run away. Then it breaks loose, runs off and gets all tangled up and finally beasts come and devour it. When a child is young, it helps to apply the brake. You see, for example, a mischievous young boy climbing a wall, where he may fall and hurt himself badly. "No, no," you shout, and you give him a slap or two. Next time he will be careful, not because he will think of the danger, but because he will be afraid of being slapped. Today no punishments are given out in schools or even in the army. This is why young people are such a menace to their teachers and the nation. In the army, in the old days, the more austere the basic training was, the greater the bravery the soldiers would show in battle.

A young person needs a spiritual guide, someone who will advise him and be eager to listen to his concerns, in order to proceed with spiritual security, without dangers, fears and dead ends. All of us, as we grow older, acquire experience from our own life and from the lives of others. But a young person lacks this experience. An older person should use his experience to help inexperienced youth avoid blunders. When young people refuse to take advice, they end up experimenting with their own lives. But if they take the advice given to them, they will have much to gain.

Young men from a Christian organization visited the *Kalyvi* once, and were boasting with self-confidence, "We don't need anybody; we'll find our own way!" Who knows why they said that? Perhaps they had been pressured too much and were rebelling. When they were about to leave, they asked me to point them the right

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direction for Iveron Monastery. "Which way should we go?" they asked. "Wait a minute," I told them, "didn't you boys say that you needed no one, that you will find your own way? Didn't you just say that? Miss this road and you'll have only a minor inconvenience; at some point, you will run into someone and he will show you the way. But who is going to show you the road to Heaven? How will you get there on your own without a guide?" One of them said, "You know, the Elder may have a point."

Youth Must Pass the Test of Purity

A few female students came to see me today and told me, "Geronda, pray so that we may pass our exams." I said, "I will pray that you pass your purity exams. This is the most important thing. Everything else falls into place after that." It was the right thing to say, wasn't it? There's no greater sight than that of modesty and purity in the faces of young people today! No greater sight!

Some traumatized young women come to see me. They live unruly lives with young men and they don't realize that these men do not have good intentions and, of course, they end up getting hurt. "What must I do, Father?" they ask. "The tavern owner," I replied, "may have the drunkard as a friend, but he will never accept him as his son-in-law. Stop having relations. If the man really loves you, he will appreciate it; if he leaves you, you will know that he doesn't love you and this way you will not be wasting your time."

The cunning devil takes advantage of young people, who, on top of everything else, have to deal with the rebellion of their flesh, and he tries to destroy them during

this difficult period of their life, when the mind is not yet mature, the experience is missing and their spiritual reserves are almost non-existent. This is why, during this critical period, young people must always seek the advice of their elders, so that they may not slip down the sweet secular slope, which will only fill their soul with anxiety and separate it eternally from God.

I know that a physiologically healthy young person cannot easily attain a spiritual state where *there is neither male nor female.*[4] This is why the Spiritual Fathers recommend that young men and women, no matter how spiritual they may be, should not spend time together; at their age, problems will naturally arise and then temptation will step in and take advantage of their youth. It is better for a young man or a young woman to bear this heavy cross and risk being considered a fool by the opposite sex for his or her spiritual prudence and innocence. This heavy cross hides all the power and wisdom of God, making a young man stronger than Sampson[5] and wiser than Solomon.[6] Better, then, that he walk down the street praying rather than looking left and right, even if relatives may misunderstand him and think that he snubbed them by not speaking with them. Otherwise, if he walks looking around with curiosity, he may get in trouble or get misunderstood by lay people who always harbour suspicious thoughts. It's a thousand times better to leave Church right away, after Liturgy, like a lone animal, and keep his spiritual good sense and whatever he learned

4. Gal. 3:28.
5. Cf. Jdg 15:14 f.
6. Cf. I Kg 3: 9-12 (LXX: III Kg 3: 9-12).

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intact, rather than stay around and stare at fancy furs or ties, and become spiritually agitated as the enemy starts scratching at his heart.

It is true, unfortunately, that there is so much filth in this world that no matter what path the soul that desires purity may follow, it will get soiled. The difference is that God will not make the same demands on a Christian who wishes to remain pure today that He made in the past. Purity requires nerves of steel; a young man must try every means to resist temptation, and he will surely have Christ's help. When divine eros is kindled in his heart, the burning is such that every other desire and unseemly picture will be burned out. When this divine fire is burning in us, we experience pleasures so divine that all other pleasures pale in comparison. When we taste heavenly manna, wild carobs will mean nothing to us. This is why we should hold fast to the steering wheel, make the sign of the cross and not be afraid. After every little struggle, heavenly delights follow. If we are brave when temptation comes, God and the *Panaghia* will help miraculously.

The Elder Augustinos had told me the following story.[7] When he was a young novice, he lived in a Monastery in his native Russia. Most of the Fathers there were old and so they would use him for various chores such as helping a Monastery employee with fishing, the Monastery's main means of support. One day the daughter of that employee came and asked her father to return home for an emergency and she stayed to help in his place. But

7. See Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, *Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters*, p. 93.

the poor girl was seized by temptation, and without thinking came on the novice with sinful intentions. Antonios, this was his name when he was in the world, was taken aback because everything happened so suddenly. He crossed himself and said, "My Christ, I'd rather drown than sin!" and plunged into the deep river. But the Good Lord, seeing the heroism of this chaste young man, who acted like Saint Martinianos[8] in order to remain chaste, kept him afloat and completely dry! "You see," he explained to me, "I jumped head first into the river and I still cannot figure out how I found myself standing up with my clothes dry!" At that moment, he had felt an internal peace and inexpressible sweetness that made every sinful thought and carnal desire caused by the indecent gestures of the young woman go away. When she saw Antonios standing up on the water, she was overcome by repentance and started weeping, deeply moved by this great miracle.

Christ does not require big things from us to help us in our struggle. He expects very little, a tiny bit. A young man was telling me that he went to Patmos[9] to worship and fell into temptation's trap. A female tourist jumped on him and hugged him while he was walking. He pushed her away saying, "My Christ I have come for

8. The biography of Saint Martinianos (we commemorate his name on February 13) mentions that when he was an ascetic, living on a rocky outcropping in the sea, a shipwrecked girl approached the rock on a raft and begged him to save her from the sea. The Saint first pulled her out of the water to safety on his rock and then, after praying, jumped into the sea. By divine Providence, dolphins came, took Saint Martinianos on their backs and carried him to safety on the shore.

9. Patmos is a Greek island in the Aegean, in the NW Dodecanese. Saint John the Theologian wrote the Apocalypse there, during his exile (95 A.D.).

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worship not for love" and he went away. That same night in his hotel room, during prayer, he saw Christ immersed in Uncreated Light. Do you see the reward he received for that one push? Others strive for years in the ascetic life and may never be blessed with something like that. And he saw Jesus Christ only because he resisted temptation. And this experience, naturally, made him stronger spiritually. Later on, he saw Saint Marcella, Saint Raphael, and Saint George more than once. One day, he came and told me "Father, say a prayer for me so that I may see Saint George again and be consoled. I cannot find any consolation in this world!" And then you see where other young people end up.

A young man with his elderly uncle came to the *Kalyvi* once and told me, "Pray for a young girl who broke her spine in an accident. Her father fell asleep at the wheel, killing himself and injuring her. Let me show you a picture of her." "It's not necessary," I said. He insisted and they showed me the picture of a girl who was lying down and two men were embracing her. "Who is this young man?" I asked. "A friend" he answered. "Will he marry her?" "No, they are just friends," he replied. "Don't hold it against them Father," the uncle told me, "that's how young people are today." "I will pray," I thought to myself, "but she does not just need her spine to be straightened out, her mind also needs correction and so does yours, you hopeless man." Where is the respect? His uncle should have told him off. And they were supposedly spiritual people. It is so sad to have spiritual guidance and still be in such a state of spiritual confusion! Even if he intended to marry her, there was no reason for her to be stretched out between the two men, and for the man to be showing me the

picture. It never crossed his mind that what he was doing was wrong. I am not bothered by the picture, but it is still not right. What sort of family will these young people make? May God help them come to their senses!

In the old days, young women would sacrifice everything to keep their chastity! I remember, during the War against Italy, they had drafted some villagers and their animals, and they got trapped on a hill by heavy snowfall. The men gathered under the snow covered spruce trees and made some shelters using spruce branches to protect themselves. The women were forced to seek protection from their fellow villagers, people they knew. Two of them, one young, one elderly, from a far away village, had to enter one of these shelters. Now, unfortunately, there are those faithless cowards for whom even a war will not make a difference. They have no feelings whatsoever for their fellow human being, who may die or get injured; if they get the chance, they will do their best to sin, because they are afraid that they may get killed and try to use all the time they have to have fun. When in danger, people should repent.

One of these men, who had sin rather than repentance in his mind, was harassing the young woman so much that she was forced to leave the group. She preferred to freeze to death from the cold rather than lose her chastity. When the elderly woman saw that her young companion had left the shelter, she followed her tracks and found her, thirty minutes away, under a small shed, in a Chapel dedicated to Saint John the Forerunner. You see how Saint John the Baptist cared about this honest woman and led her to his Chapel which she never knew existed! And guess what else the Saint did! He appeared to a sol-

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dier[10] in his sleep and told him to go to his Chapel as soon as possible.

So the soldier got up in the middle of the snow-lit night and headed to the Chapel; he had a rough idea where it was. When he got there he saw the two women stuck in the snow up to their knees, blue in the face and frozen from the cold. He immediately opened the Chapel and they all entered and felt better. The soldier had nothing else to offer them, besides a scarf for the old lady and a pair of gloves which he told them to share, so that they could warm first one hand and then the other. They then told him about the temptation they had confronted. "Why," the soldier asked the young woman, "did you decide to leave in the middle of the night, with all this snow and head to an unknown place?" And she replied, "I did all that I could do for my part, and I was convinced that Christ would take care of the rest." Feeling their pain and trying to console them, the soldier said spontaneously, "Your troubles are over, tomorrow you will be home." These words made them happy and they felt even warmer. Sure enough, the Battalion of Mountain Transports opened the road and, in the morning, military trucks came, and the poor women were taken home. It is Greek women like them, vested in divine Grace – rather than stripped of clothes and divine Grace alike – who deserve our praise and admiration. Later, that beast – may God forgive me for this word – told the Commander that a certain soldier had broken the Chapel's door and put mules inside! The Commander replied, "I don't believe

10. This soldier was in fact Elder Paisios himself. The incident took place during the Guerilla War when the Elder was doing his military service.

the man you accuse would do such a thing." In the end, he was sent to prison.

Young People Will Sense True Love

– Geronda, it seems that people who want to destroy society, have seized upon its foundation, its roots, our young people, and have destroyed them.

– There is no way that they will succeed. Evil self-destructs. In Russia, after the revolution, they had destroyed everything and look what is happening now, after three generations! God will not allow it. And He will not judge the sins of today's youth as strictly as He will judge the sins of our generation.

– Geronda, how come some young men and women who lead secular lives give very good answers to questions of faith?

– These young people had good intentions but were not able to apply the brakes on themselves at the right time and so they were swept along. That is why they give the right answers. What I mean to say is that someone, for example, wants to follow a particular path in life; he wants to go in that direction, but he finds it hard to follow. And when he sees another who succeeds, he has great respect for him. God will not abandon those who want the good, because they lack malice. The time will come when they will find the strength to follow the right path.

– Geronda, how should we approach young people who have gone astray?

– Love is the answer. Where there is true and noble love, young people will sense it; they will be informed right away and feel disarmed. Young men, who come to

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my *Kalyvi*, come from all walks of life, with all kinds of problems. I welcome them, I give them a treat, we start a conversation and soon enough we become friends. They open their heart to me and accept the love I give them. Among them are some who are so deprived of love! Poor souls, they are thirsty for it! You can tell right away those who have never felt a mother's or father's love. If you care for them, if they sense your love, they forget all their problems, even their drug use, all their ills disappear, they stop getting in trouble and end up coming to the Holy Mountain as pious pilgrims. You see, they somehow come to sense God's love. And I see in them such nobility that it breaks my heart. They refuse financial aid, even though they need it so much, and get a job during the day to make ends meet, and go to school at night. They deserve all the help they can get. Near the New Train Station, in Thessaloniki, some of these young people, men and women, will pull their resources together, and stay under the same roof. You could find as many as fifteen living in one apartment. Many of them come from broken homes. Some of them will steal to make ends meet, but others have *philotimo* and will not do it. For years, I have been telling many people to approach them, to help them. I had asked for a Church to be built near by so that they can gather there and have a shelter. Now they have built a small Chapel dedicated to the Apostle and Deacon Philip, the protector of railway workers.

What I have come to realize is that; if we don't take advantage of the opportunities offered to us when we are young, the devil will exploit this situation. Don't we have the saying "Strike while the iron is hot"? When iron smiths wanted to join two pieces of iron together – this

was before modern welding – they would put the iron in the fire, pour hot water and borax on it, and then, the moment they removed it, while still spewing sparks, they would join it to another piece. But this would not work, if the iron got cold. It's the same thing with a young person. When opportunities present themselves and he shows no interest, he will concern himself with other people, judging them, criticizing their ways, and thus slowly losing the Grace of God. But if he is full of divine fervour, he will prosper. This is why parents should help their children as much as they can when they are still young. Children are like empty cassette tapes. If we fill them with Christ, they will stay close to Him forever. If we don't, it will be easier for them to go astray when they become older. But if we help them when they are young, even if they later stray a bit, they will eventually come to their senses. Wood soaked in oil does not rot. Youth soaked in the "oil" of piety and the fear of God will have nothing to fear later.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Impudence and Lack of Respect

Boldness Drives Reverence Away

Geronda, what causes us to speak boldly and without reserve? Where is boldness (*parrhesia*) from?

– From Paris... This kind of speech betrays impudence; it drives away the fear of God in us, much like smoke will drive bees away from the beehive.

-- Geronda, how can I avoid such boldness?

– You must feel that you are beneath everybody else. This takes a lot of humility. Being the youngest here, you must have respect and reverence for all the Sisters. State your thoughts with humility and avoid appearing as if you know everything. God will then be blessing you with His Grace and you will be making good progress. Outspoken boldness is the novice's worst enemy, because it takes away reverence. Usually such boldness results in rebellion and, then, one starts becoming insensitive and indifferent to small sins, until gradually they become a habit and second nature; but deep inside the soul cannot find rest and is filled with anxiety. It is then difficult to understand one's condition because the heart is smeared with grime and cannot feel the wrong turns it is making.

– Geronda, what is the relationship between simplicity and boldness?

– There is a very clear difference between the two. Simplicity entails reverence and has a child-like quality. But the mark of boldness is audacity.

Sometimes, a person who is candid and frank will also be impudent. When we are not careful, straightforwardness and simplicity may end up harbouring impudence. We say, for instance, "I am a straight arrow," or "I am a plain person," and, without realizing it, we put a lot of impudence in our words. It's one thing to be plain; it's another to be impudent.

– Geronda, what is to be spiritually reserved?

– It is to have the fear of God in the good sense of the word. This fear and sense of awe, brings gladness and sweetness to the heart; it begins to drip with honey, of the spiritual kind! You see a little child who is reserved and out of respect for his father, will not even look at him in the eyes. When he goes close to him to ask for something, he blushes! That's the kind of child one wants to place on the iconostasis! And then you have the child that will think, "He is my father after all," and with that in mind, he will put on airs and act out. And when he wants something, he demands it with tantrums and threats.

In a good family, the children will usually move about with a sense of freedom. They will have respect for the parents, without being overly reserved and afraid of speaking out – discipline is not rigid as in the military. The children enjoy their parents and the parents enjoy their children. "Love does not know shame,"[1] Abba Isaac

1. See Saint Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies*, Homily 51, p. 245.

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says. Love has courage in the good sense of the word. It has reverence and devotion and so it wins over fear. One person with reserve will hesitate and be afraid because he does not have true reserve; one who does, who has the true, spiritual reserve, is never afraid. When the reserve we feel is spiritual, we are filled with joy. When a small child loves his mother and father with this kind of boldness, it is not afraid of being struck by them. He takes his father's hat, even when it's an officer's hat, throws it in the air and has such a good time. He is plain and simple, but in the good sense, not that of audacity. It is important that we separate the one from the other. Where there is no respect, no reserve, we end up with impudence, boldness and audacity. Take for example a young woman who lies in bed and tells her mother, "Mother, bring me a glass of water! Make it very cold! Oh, this is not cold. Didn't I say cold?" When they start out like this, they will no doubt come to question Saint Paul's admonition, *Let the wife see that she respects her husband.*[2] "Why should a woman fear her husband?" they will object.

What they don't understand is that this kind of fear is filled with respect, while respect is filled with love. It's not possible that I respect someone and not love him. A woman should respect her husband. The man should love his wife. What they do nowadays is level everything; families end up falling apart because they take the Gospel and read it upside down. "It's the wife that must obey," says the husband. What he does not understand is that if you don't have love, you cannot make even a kitten

2. Eph 5:33. The original Greek text has: "*Let the wife see that she fears her husband*".

obey you. If you have no love, the other person will not respond, they will not receive the information, and you will not be able to ask them for anything, even for a glass of water. When we have respect for the other person, we have respect for ourselves too, but not of the calculating, self-serving kind. The respect we show to others is full of *philotimo*. But where our respect is mainly for our own self, *philotimo* is absent.

Respect For Elders

– Sometimes, Geronda, I speak badly to my elders. I realize it and go to confession.

– Since you realize it and confess it, you will gradually feel disgust for yourself, the good kind of disgust, and you will be humbled and then the Grace of God will come and your bad habit will go away.

– Geronda, sometimes I joke around and tease the Sisters lovingly, but I am afraid that I might be too bold.

– You are too young to be teasing others! Usually in a family, the older members tease and joke with the younger ones and not the opposite. This way both young and old enjoy the exchange. It's not right for a child to tease a grandmother or a grandfather. Can you imagine a little child going up to his dad all of a sudden and tickling him under the chin? It's different when the adult pokes fun at the child and the child enjoys it and responds with ease and delight. This way, the adult turns into a child and both end up having a good time.

– Geronda, when I offer my opinion to an older person about something he said, which I think is not correct, and he rejects it, should I then come to agree with him?

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– No, you should not agree with something that is wrong. You must say what is right, but in a good and proper manner. For example, you may say, "Maybe we should do it this way, what do you think? It's just a thought." Or, you can say, "I have this thought..." This is how you become a magnet and attract the Grace of God. There are some people who will speak very boldly, not intentionally but out of habit. In any case, no matter what, one must have respect for one's elders. Respect is something that older people want; even if they have flaws, they still have their good sides; they have experience in life. When asked for your opinion, you should express it humbly and respectfully, without presuming that things are as you say, because the other person may know something you do not know or you did not think about. When someone is young and while listening to a conversation on a particular subject, thinks that his take on it is more correct, what he should say, if the person he is talking with is of the same age, is something like "This idea crossed my mind." If the conversation is with an older person, then the one who is younger should think, "I've just had this blasphemous thought..." And even if the thought is correct, it would be impudence for him to state it, if he is not the person in charge.

– When you say older, do you mean an older person in years or in spiritual maturity?

– I mean primarily an older person in age. Besides, even someone who has reached an advanced spiritual state should respect his elders.

– Is it right, Geronda, to respect more someone who is younger in age but more advanced spiritually, than someone who is older but less advanced spiritually?

– No, this is not the right approach. No matter what an older person is, you must respect him for his age. You will respect an older person for his age and a younger person for his devotion. Where there is respect, the younger person will respect the older and the older person will respect the younger. Hidden in respect is love. The Apostle Paul says, *Pay all of them their due, taxes to whom taxes are due ... respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.*[3]

– Is it wrong for a young person to reprimand an older person?

– This is the habit of the new generation. But Holy Scripture says, *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault.*[4] It does not say, "Go and tell your father his fault." But these days, young people seem to have an opinion, to carry the spirit of resistance, without realizing it, about everything. They consider this behaviour natural. They speak with audacity and tell you things like, "I was straight as an arrow." They have been affected by this world's vagrant spirit and have respect for nothing. The young have no respect for their elders and don't even realize how bad this is. But what can you expect when you hear a young person say that respect for older people is "old fashioned" and when in his mind this is proof of his personality? We need to be very careful. What young people hear from the secular spirit today is, "Do not listen to your parents, your teachers..." This is why even young children turn out much worse now than they did in the past. And those who are damaged the most are the

3. Rom 13:7.
4. Mt 18:15.

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ones whose parents do not realize the harm they are doing by the admiration and praise they show them when they speak out with impudence.

Once, two young cousins, around eight and nine years old, had come to my *Kalyvi* with their fathers. I put one of them to my right and the other one to my left. On that day, it happened that an artist friend of mine, a very nice young man was also there. He could sketch your portrait in no time. "Dionysi," I said, "why don't you sketch these children as they sit here with me?" "Let me see if I can manage," he said, "because they can't stand still." He took out a sheet of paper and started drawing. One of the boys jumps up and says in front of all these people, "Let's see what you can come up with, dummy!" And there were all these people all around. The young artist was not disturbed at all. "That's today's children for you Father," he said. I, on the other hand, was really furious. What the boy said made my blood boil. The father of the boy acted like nothing had happened! Can you imagine speaking to a thirty-year old man like that, while he is sketching your portrait? This is audacity, irreverence and so much more! Could this boy ever become a monk? When mothers do not take care of their children, this is how they turn out; they are ruined. It's the mother that makes the difference; she is the foundation. If things have changed in Russia, it's because the mothers secretly kept both their faith and reverence, and in so doing helped their children. Fortunately there is still some yeast of Christian families left; otherwise, our situation would be hopeless.

– Geronda, if children, who are raised in this manner, want to change their ways later in life or become monks, will they be able to?

If they realize that what they were doing is wrong, Christ will help them. In other words, the moment the good kind of concern enters the soul, the problem is resolved. But if they never question their way, then they will end up saying of their abbot or abbess, "What is this, a dictatorship? Have you ever heard of such absolute discipline in our times?" How can someone who thinks this way, ever change? And yet, there are some young monks, who will come up and tell me this kind of nonsense.

This is how respect is gradually disappearing. Young boys come to my *Kalyvi,* and most of them will sit with their legs crossed while their elders are standing. Others, while they see that there are some logs a few steps away, are too lazy to go and fetch them. I must go and bring them. And while they see me carrying them, they do not offer to give me a hand. They want water to drink but they will not go to get it by themselves. I must go and bring it to them and they even send me back for a second cup. I find this so striking. Here they are thirty young men healthy and fit, they come to my *Kalyvi,* they see me limping and carrying a box of sweets, a large vessel of water and cups to serve them, and they will not move a finger. They sit there waiting, and only a brigadier general, seasoned in battles, will get up and offer to help. They behave as if my *Kalyvi* is a restaurant or a hotel, and all they need to do is wave at the waiter to serve them. You know what I did on a few occasions? I went and got the water, brought it where they were, poured it right in front of them and said, "I went and got you the water, fellows, but I don't think that it will help you any."

Then, in city buses, you will see children sitting and old people standing, or young men and women sitting with

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their legs crossed, while others much older in age get up and offer their seat to an elderly person. But the young will not give up their seat. "I paid for it," they object; they couldn't care less. In the old days, people had the right spirit! Women would sit outside on the street and when a priest or an elderly person would pass by, they would stand up; and they taught their children to do the same.

There are times when I get so upset! You see older, serious people with high positions in society having a conversation, and then these children come and interrupt with such audacity, only to say something foolish and they consider it an achievement. I gesture to them to stop interrupting, but nothing. You must put them to shame before they will stop, otherwise they will go on talking. No Patristic text says that young people should talk that way. In fact, we read in the *Gerontikon*, "An Elder once said..." It does not say anywhere, "A young man once said..." In the old days, children would not speak in the presence of adults, and they were happy at that. Nor did they sit where the adults sat. They were reserved and respectful and even blushed when they talked to adults And if a child spoke badly to his parents, he would not dare appear in public out of shame. On the Holy Mountain, if a monk did not have a white beard, he was not allowed in the choir. Nowadays, everybody is allowed; novices and pre-novices are gathering around the lectern to chant. At least they should learn to behave with respect and reverence.

It is not actually unusual to hear even a student at the *Athonias* Academy tell the Director, who is also a Bishop, "Holy Director, let's speak man to man". This is where things have come to. And what's worse is that they will come and tell you "Why? What did I say that was so

bad?" He will not say "Forgive me, Father, may I have your blessing to express a thought, as dumb as it may be?" Instead, they come at you and speak their mind, as if there was nothing wrong. "It's your opinion versus mine." Do you see what I mean? Unfortunately this same spirit has entered Monasticism and spiritual life. You hear novice monks saying, "I have told the Elder so many times but he does not understand me! You know how many times I have told him"! It's like they are saying, "The Elder will not correct himself." "Why," they go on, "can't I even express my opinion?" I feel like exploding when I hear such things. And at the end they will tell you, "O, I didn't realize that I upset you! I am sorry." He wants me to forgive him not for his selfish audacity and impudence, but for making my blood boil!

They Come to the Point of Judging Even God

— Geronda, is judging everyone and everything new to this generation or has it always been this way?

— No, it was not like that in the old days; this is the spirit of our times. Nowadays they will not only judge laymen, politicians and Church leaders; they will also judge the Saints and have come to the point of judging even God. "God," they will say, "did not act right in that case; He should have acted this way." Can you believe it? "But my son, how can you tell God what to do?" I object. "Why can't I?" he replies, "This is what I think." They don't realize the degree of their impudence. This secular spirit has destroyed so many good things. Evil begins this way and slowly turns into blasphemy. They pass judgment on

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God and don't mind in the least that their thoughts may be blasphemous. And there are some among them who, being tall and able to reason a bit, will start criticizing, "This boy here is so short, a mere hand-full, that fellow walks crooked, one does this, the other that..." They don't care about anyone.

A man came once to my *Kalyvi* and at some point said to me about something, "God should not have made it this way." "Can you keep a pebble suspended in the mid-air?" I asked him. "Those stars you see up there are not sparkling beads! They are huge masses in space that move with dizzying speed and yet will not collide." He insisted, "But in my opinion, God should not have arranged it that way." Can you believe the man? Are we the ones to judge God? Logic is everywhere and trust in God is nowhere to be found. And if you try to talk sense to these people, they will say, "Excuse me, all I did is to give my opinion; don't I have the right to do that?" The things that God hears from us! Fortunately He doesn't take us at our word.

According to the Old Testament, God told the Israelites that when they entered Canaan, they should destroy everybody who lived there.[5] God must have had something in mind. But they thought otherwise, "That's not very humane, we should let them live; let's not kill them." But then they were lured to immorality and idolatry and started sacrificing their sons and daughters to idols, as we read in the Psalm.[6] God knows what He is doing. But there will always be those who are insolent enough to ask, "Why should God have created hell?" So, people

5. Cf. Dt 7:2 f.
6. Ps 106:37. *They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons*

start criticizing and, once that happens, our spiritual life is depleted, the Grace of God is gone and our understanding cannot go any deeper and come to realize why God acted in a certain way. To merely ask "Why?" is to be judgmental, full of pride and egoism.

– Geronda, some young people ask us "Why did Christ have to be crucified? Couldn't God have saved the world another way?"

– But God chose to save the world in this way, and they are still not moved! Imagine if He had chosen some other means. And then there are those who say, "Nothing happened to God Himself; it was His Son Who was sacrificed." As I see it, a father would rather sacrifice his life than see his child sacrificed. It is more painful for a father to face his child's death than to face his own. How can you begin to persuade them? These people don't understand what love is.

Someone else asked me, "Adam had two sons, Abel and Cain; how did Cain's wife get there?" But if one should read a little further in the Old Testament it says clearly that after Seth, Adam had other sons and daughters.[7] Cain[8] had left his home and wandered in the mountains after his brother's murder and did not know that the wife he took was actually his sister. God provided that men should descend from one tribe to prevent malice and crime. This way they would reason, "We all come from the same father and mother, Adam and Eve;" and perhaps this thought would put the break on human malice. But that's not what happened. Our world is full of malice!

7. Cf. Gen 5:4.
8. Gen 4:14-15.

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The things I must put up with from people who come to see me at my *Kalyvi*! I tell them, "I have a headache and I can't get any aspirin around here." So they go away unhappy. They won't understand why I would say such a thing to them and so they complain, "We went into so much trouble to get here and now he tells us that he has a headache"! And then there are those who will ask me, "Should we go get you some aspirin?"

Impudence Repels Divine Grace

We need to be very careful. Unruly and careless behaviour stands in the way of divine Grace; it's the greatest obstacle. Where there is lack of respect, the Grace of God will not approach. The more respect young people have to parents, teachers and elders in general, the more Grace God will pour on them. But if they are unruly and rebellious, then the Grace of God will abandon them. Secular freedom has driven away both piety and common courtesy. Some young men will come to my *Kalyvi*, and call out to their father, "Hey, dad, do you have any cigarettes? I have ran out of mine." You would not hear such a thing in the old days. The few boys that smoked did so secretly. Now, no one sees anything wrong with it! How can the Grace of God still remain with them? Today, there are some young women who will use the filthiest language you can imagine to insult their brothers for going to Church and being religious, and they will do that in front of their father and mother; and the father will say nothing. I was so upset when I heard this, that I started mumbling to myself when I was left alone.

Today children are destroyed by two things: first, the secular world in which we live; secondly, the fact that their parents are also largely secular. This secular environment has a great impact. Only a few children will be reserved and show *philotimo*. Audacity makes children unmanageable. Parents will bring their children to me and say, "Father, my child is possessed." And I see that the children – God forbid – do not have a demon; possession is a rare thing. Most of them suffer from an external demonic influence. In other words, the demon actually rules their life not from inside but from the outside; but even in this way, he manages to get the job done. And how does it all start? It starts from impudence and audacity.

When children begin to speak to adults with audacity, they drive God's Grace away. And when God's Grace departs, the demons get to work; children become rowdy and get into all kinds of mischief. But take children who have reverence and respect, who listen to their parents, their teachers and their elders, and you will see that they are full of Grace and blessed by God. God's Grace protects and shelters them. Where there is great reverence for God, and respect for one's elders, divine Grace comes and fills the soul, making it all aglow and obvious by the radiating light. But don't expect the Grace of God to go to unruly children; only to those who have *philotimo*, who have respect and reverence. And it is not difficult to identify such children. One look at their eyes and you will see how bright they are! And the greater the respect they have for their parents and elders, the greater the Grace of God. But God's Grace will not rest in unruly children.

A child that is constantly issuing demands "No, I don't want this, I want that," will end up a rebel, a devil. That's

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what Lucifer also wanted; to place his throne above the throne of God. Just look around and you'll see that those children whose parents cater to their every demand, grow up to be rebels. If these children do not repent, and get rid of the deadly wave that is thrashing them on all sides, if they go on behaving with audacity then, God forbid, they will be twice abandoned. They will reach a point where they will blaspheme against God and when that happens, the evil spirits will come and rule their lives.

"Honour Thy Father and Thy Mother"[9]

Look at where children are today! They will take no advice, no discipline of any kind. And they certainly will not take a slap or two here and there. Instead of respect, they are full of egoism and nerves. The freedom they have, they abuse. A child will tell his parents, "I will call the police on you." Recently, a fifteen-year old boy did something that was very wrong and his father slapped him. The boy went and sued his father and the case went to trial. At the trial the father said, "You are committing an injustice against me, because if I had not slapped my son then, he would have been in prison now, and it would not be you hurting but me." At that point he got up, slapped the boy twice and said to the court, "You should try me for slapping him now, but not for slapping him before; go ahead put me in jail because this time I had no reason to slap him."

My point is that things have gotten out of hand. In the old days, our parents would scold us, give us a slap or two

9. Ex 20:12.

now and then, but no bad thought ever came through our minds. We accepted being slapped as we accepted being caressed, without reacting and trying to figure out whether the wrong we did was great or small. We believed that they spanked us for our own good. We knew that our parents loved us and sometimes they would caress us, sometimes they would kiss us and sometimes they would slap us. For the slaps, the caresses and the kisses of parents are all given out of love. When parents discipline their children, their heart suffers. When children get a slap it's only their cheek that hurts. And we all know that the pain of the heart is greater than the pain of the cheek. Whatever a mother might do, whether she reprimands, spanks or caresses her children, will always come from her heart, she will act out of maternal love. But when children will not realize this, and speak with audacity, when they object to everything you tell them and act stubbornly, then they will drive God's Grace that is in them away. And then, as is to be expected, they will be vulnerable to the influence of demons.

– Geronda, aren't some parents incompetent?

– Yes, but God will not abandon their children. God is not unjust. The wild pear trees are full of wild pears. On the way to my *Kalyvi*, there is a wild crab apple tree. So full of fruit is this tree that one cannot see the leaves, and the branches break from the weight. But take a look at cultivated crab apple trees, that are regularly sprayed, and I doubt that you will see a trace of fruit on them.

Generation Gap

The world has turned into a madhouse. Small children go to bed at midnight, when they should be fast asleep

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by sunset. They are locked up in apartment buildings, surrounded by concrete and they have to follow an adult schedule. What are they supposed to do? Children are stuck one way and parents another. Young people come and tell me, "Our parents don't understand us." Parents come and say the same thing, "Our children don't understand us." There is a growing gap between them which will not disappear until children put themselves in the place of their parents and parents do the same with their children. Children who do not cause their parents pain will not suffer in the hands of their children, when they become parents. The spiritual laws at work ensure that the reverse is also true. Children who are troublemakers will one day suffer the same in the hands of their children.

– Geronda, some young people claim that they have been harmed by their parents' love.

– They are not right. When a child has *philotimo*, it cannot be harmed by the parents' love. But if he takes advantage of it, then that will ruin him. Only an impaired child can be harmed by the love of his parents. Instead of being grateful to God for his parents, for their love, he is upset because they are kind and good to him, when there are young people out there who have no parents, no one to care for them? I don't know what to tell you! When a child does not recognize his parents as his benefactors, and does not love them – especially when the parents are God-fearing people – how will he be able to respect and love God – the Great Benefactor and Father of all human beings – a reality that is far more difficult for him to grasp?

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His message

First we believe in God and then we love God and His image, the man. Faith increases with prayers. "Add us faith".

"As i have realised all evil comes from unfaithfulness. When someone doesn't believe in God he wants to have fun. So he falls into every kind of sin".

"People must understand the deepest meaning of life that is, that this life is given to prepare us for the future life. The people must find a guide, a religius guide, as the ones who need a guide when they travels. Then with the help of the religius guide people will programme their life, with a little study, a little prayer and avoiding the causes of sin and the wordly thinking which is the worst of all. So their heart will be devoted to Christ".

"We must wrestle with mettle to save ourselves and not to pain Christ. Christ will tell us "My child i have done so many things to save you. I have shed my blood and i have gone through passion, what have you done to save yourself?"

"Each person must find his inclination. The hard-working person, either in married life or in monastic, will be successful".

"We should prefer sadness and accept it more than we accept happiness. The bitter medicine is usually better than the sweet because it cures. Real happiness springs from pain".

"What prevents people from succeding in his spiritual life is the fact that he uses his brain not to improve his spiritual life but to do other things".

"We must feel the pain for our present state to be able to pray with all our heart".

"Now it is the time to seperate the kids from the lambs, the faithful fom the unfaithful. Later there will be time when we take examinations and

suffer persecation for our faith and copper will be separated from gold".

"When somebody is troubled because he suffers for other, cares for other, makes their problems his own problems then he will get the pay of a martyr. How lovely are the people who sacrifice everything! They don't have any problems and their face shines because they are filled with God's joy".

"The basis of our spiritual life is to think of the others first and then of ourselves. When we get into the others place and understand them then we are related to Christ".

"God's grace is an expensive thing. It must find the person who spiritually agrees with God to come and stay in his heart. And of course the person must work hard to get it, while we want God's grace to come and release us from weaknesses without struggling for it".

"It takes lots of sacrifice, self denial, modesty mettle to make the Holy Ghost come and stay in people's hearts. Spiritual life isn't enjoyment. Christ has put the plug but our wires are rusty and they don't get God's grace. We should remove the rust from our wires, struggle to know ourselves, stop passions and get the virtues to make God's grace visit us".

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